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Interview with Jay Coats
1/16/08, 11:30 a.m.
Conference Room, Engineering Sciences Building

Interview start time: 11:31 a.m.

Roy Nutter: Explained Jan Boyles' role as recorder.

RN: Describe overview of service in the West Virginia University College of Business and Economics.

Jay Coats: Came to college in 1971. Retired in 2005. Served as Director of Graduate Programs from 1976-1993. Served as Dean from September 2001-June 2005. Also served as professor of accounting.

RN: Why is eMBA not mentioned in graduate catalog (from period under examination)?

JC: eMBA and MBA are separate programs. MBA program is directed toward "a full-time, on-campus, traditional student." Before eMBA program, there was variation of the MBA program for part-time students. Students took classes on weekends. Programs were offered for faculty to teach classes off campus.

JC: In Fall 1995, COB decided to "cast out the part-time MBA program." Replacement - eMBA. Degree was offered with technology throughout the state, using a video/voice connection. The COB was pushed by the University to use technology. Required private fundraising to get started.

JC: eMBA is offered at two campus locations + Morgantown. Each location operates as a cohort. Locations change by semester.

JC: Takes 2.5 years to complete program. 48 hrs. required. Students never have to travel. Every semester, there's a new cohort. eMBA program has used seven locations.

RN: Hypothetical – Student starts taking classes with cohort. Student drops out of program. Student returns years later. How does student start taking classes again?

JC: Students can drop into another site to complete cohort or can complete independent study credit. Program is "designed for part-time audiences at the executive level or higher." Professors know students have busy work, travel schedules. Classes are videotaped and made available online. Students have ability to get caught up on week's activities.

JC: "People make a big deal of the fact that she [Bresch] may not have been in class. Well, sure -- she may not have been in class. That doesn't bother me a bit."

RN: Did Coats issue a letter grade for [REDACTED] - [REDACTED]? Can this grade be verified from Coats' personal records?

JC: Doubted he kept personal records.

RN: Asked Coats to find records, if available. Coats agreed to look.

Michael Lastinger: Student used different names - Heather Manchin, Heather Kirby, Heather Bresch. Does Coats remember her?

JC: Cannot remember her as Heather Manchin.

RN: Asked about course [REDACTED] taught - [REDACTED] - [REDACTED]. Course was team taught by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. Asked Coats to find records, if available. Coats agreed to look.

JC: Didn't remember teaching [REDACTED] credit course.

JC: When program started in 1995, faculty was a "conservative lot." Those accustomed to teaching traditional classes needed to adapt. Paul Speaker contacted individuals to "take part in a grand experiment." Five or six faculty started in Fall 1995. Development of the eMBA started in January 1995. One faculty member agreed to teach, but then decided against it six weeks before the classes were to begin. The faculty teaching courses were not driven by the program's needs, but rather "who was available and who could make it work."

JC: Speaker "repackaged classes" from the MBA program. Curriculum "evolved over time." Administrators moved fast in getting classes through faculty senate.

RN: Hypothetical - If a student started in Fall 1996, they would finish...

JC: Fall 1998.

ML: Did COB start eMBA program before official approval from faculty senate?

JC: Would need to "go back and review that."

ML: Did the eMBA program go through faculty senate?

RN: Did the eMBA program go through faculty senate or graduate council?

JC: Courses were approved by faculty senate. The eMBA is same as regular MBA - just different version.

ML: Are the requirements for eMBA same as MBA?

JC: eMBA program starts two weeks before University in session. Finishes two/three weeks after University finishes. Caused problems with tuition payments, record keeping, registration. Sometimes course was taught partially in spring, partially in summer.

RN: How was it handled when a course extended into a new semester?

JC: The schedule "muddied up the waters." Problems with registration, record keeping. It was a "hassle with Admissions and Records."

RN: So did you keep your own records?

JC: Recommended panel talk to Speaker on issue. COB kept own records, which were "reconciled with Admissions and Records." Speaker is an "innovative and aggressive guy." For instance, "He would tell Admissions and Records that everything that you need to know is out there on the drive to download. Maybe it worked. Maybe it didn't." Some courses would start in the middle of the semester.

RN: How would you handle registration and paying for fees (for courses overlapping semesters)?

JC: Often fees "were not charged" and "there were omissions in record keeping."

ML: (referring to BUE 4) – In Coats' ██████ class, the grade recorded was ██████." For the ██████ course, the grade reported was ██████

ML: Hypothetical – Student is not on roster. Student contends they were registered for the class. But student is not on roll. How would you deal with a student who is in the class, but not on the roster?

JC: Would refer issues to graduate director. "By and large, we did not let people do that." Speaker would "act as a go between" – facilitating conversation between student/faculty member. Doesn't think that an eMBA student would sit in on class.

ML: Hypothetical – Student is on roster. Student never attends class. How would you deal with that issue?

JC: No midterms in grad school. Would tell grad director. Would likely submit ██████ or did not attend.

RN: Does business school require paperwork for students who receive "I" – specifically, contracts that would detail work to be completed to modify the grade?

JC: Did not recall. [For ██████], ██████ could have issued ██████ Student could have completed half of the course, but did not complete work with other instructor. ██████ and ██████ split weeks teaching. Each instructor would assign grade at end of semester. ██████ and ██████ would agree on weighting.

ML: Explains how "I" is perhaps the "most carefully documented grade." Explains that college, Admissions and Records and the department would receive copies of an incomplete document. A contract would also detail work left to be accomplished. Any sense on how panel can find those records?

JC: Did not keep personal records.

ML: Where, specifically, could the panel look for documentation relating to incomplete grades?

JC: Best guess – graduate office. COB records office primarily assists undergraduate students. Grades used to be submitted through undergraduate records office, who forwarded grades to Admissions and Records. Coats believes that function has been "pulled out" of the undergraduate office. Not aware of any records that were kept in the Dean's office.

RN: Would grad director or faculty complete grade modification paperwork?

JC: Instructor.

RN: How were incompletes handled back then?

JC: Depends on who gave the [REDACTED]. There were different rules for graduate and undergraduate work. Believes that [REDACTED] gave [REDACTED] for his class.

RN: Would someone follow up with incomplete grades?

JC: Would hope so. The off-campus nature of the program leads many students to "drop out and disappear" for years. "Given the nature of that clientele, we would try to work it out while maintaining our academic integrity."

RN: Isn't there time limit on classes to be used toward graduation?

JC: Students may need to revalidate classes.

RN: Asked Boyles to contact [REDACTED] for an interview.

RN: Asked about different COB grad programs.

JC: There have been a number over the years. Described master of professional accountancy program. MBA. Ph.D. Coats served as director of all programs in 1976. When Speaker assumed duties, he spun some programs back to faculty.

RN: What are the responsibilities of the grad director?

JC: Administration, advising, course planning, select faculty for teaching courses. In addition, there are several committees – admissions, curriculum. COB does not have certification committee.

ML: Can you explain a no report grade?

JC: “Not typical.” Shows on grade report. Student has not participated in class.

ML: So student's name is on the roster, but didn't come to class?

JC: If there is an agreement on work left to be completed, then an incomplete should be issued. An NR grade is awarded when “you can't tell.” Coats described an NR as, “You were never here or I don't know how you are.” Faculty often call Admissions and Records for guidance in such cases.

RN: How do grades get awarded in eMBA program? What components are used in grading?

JC: There's a “wide variety.” Depends on nature of material. If management course, more experiential learning, case studies. If accounting/finance, more numbers oriented/analysis. Test instruments vary. Coats bases his grades “almost entirely” on examination. Exams are delivered through the Internet. Students have a given number of days to respond. Has in place an honor system and a check to ensure no plagiarism. Called his grading “fairly traditional.” Might have more case studies if different instructor.

RN: Attempts to summarize Coats grading explanation. Incomplete grade could probably/possibly be awarded if another faculty member did not receive all course material, but student completed some work. A no report grade would occur if the student is registered for the course, but the instructor does not know who the person is. In other words, it's a “non person.” Does that sound right?

JC: “That would be my view.”

RN: Did the degree go through Board of Trustees?

JC: eMBA was not a new degree. The requirements are the same as MBA. Both degrees have 48 hours. Content is the same in full-time, eMBA program. “All components are there, but they are repackaged. But the courses themselves will not align.” The University issues the MBA. The college issues the eMBA.

JC: Some record keeping issues were reported when COB moved from Armstrong to current location (perhaps 1990?). Storage facilities in BUE are smaller than ARM. Keep converting storage spaces into offices. “Storage is a major problem.” Says that the COB is “probably not as diligent” in record keeping. Knows that Admissions and Records has a backup.

Interview ending time: 12:14 p.m.